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ABSTRACT

In response to the need for realistic materials for training inservice and/or preservice teachers in classroom discipline, seventy-nine first-year vocational education teachers in public secondary schools in Florida were studied. The purpose of the study was to identify critical and frequent discipline incidents and the appropriate alternatives for handling them; to identify discipline problems which should be included in preservice and/or inservice education; and to compare the solutions used by the teachers with the solutions proposed by experts in the field. Data were collected by means of a critical incident form derived from McFadden's Model, then screened by two panels of experts. The study found that (1) there was a discrepancy between what the first-year teachers did to resolve discipline problems and what experts felt "ought to be done," with the teachers more likely to use short-term solutions; (2) the two panels of experts disagreed on "effective" solutions for a given critical incident; (3) obtaining specific solutions to specific discipline problems was not feasible; (4) first-year teachers have needs for training in handling discipline problems that have not been met by preservice or inservice education; (5) student placement and the laboratory setting were factors in discipline problems; and (6) students' disruptive personal habits were most often perceived as causes of critical discipline incidents. (KC)

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THE IDENTIFICATION AND VALIDATION OF CRITICAL INCIDENTS IN CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE AND THEIR SOLUTIONS AS REPORTED BY FIRST-YEAR VOCATIONAL TEACHERS IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was 1) to identify those discipline incidents that are both critical and frequent in occurrence and the appropriate alternatives for handling the selected incidents, 2) to identify those discipline problems which should be included in pre-service and/or in-service education, and 3) to compare the solution types used by the teachers with the solution types proposed by experts in the field. The study was developed in response to the need for realistic materials for use in training in-service and/or pre-service vocational teachers in the area of classroom discipline.

The selected sample included seventy-nine first-year vocational teachers who were currently teaching in public secondary schools in twenty-nine county districts in the state of Florida. Data were collected by means of a critical incident form derived from McFadden's Model, which was revised based on recommendations from inside and outside panel members. One hundred and sixteen incidents in classroom discipline which the respondents identified as having the most difficult to handle problems and which were common occurrences in the classroom were reported. In addition,

the participants were provided an opportunity to include comments regarding discipline and teacher education.

After the critical incidents were collected, a screening procedure was employed to delete those incidents which did not meet the established criteria. The critical incidents and solutions were submitted to an inside panel of experts to validate the incidents. The five-member panel was asked 1) to determine if the critical incidents submitted by the teachers met the established criteria, 2) to evaluate the solution strategies, rating them as acceptable or not acceptable, and 3) to propose a modified or alternative solution if the teacher's solution was rated not acceptable.

A revised list of twenty-nine critical incidents, reported teacher solutions and suggested inside panel solutions was submitted to an outside panel of experts in the field to evaluate the potential effectiveness of each solution. The outside panel consisted of fifteen professionals from six different states representing fourteen different institutions. This phase of the study sought to identify those solutions which were perceived by the outside panel as likely to be effective.

Seven categories of critical incidents were deductively derived through an analysis of the critical incidents reported by the teachers and validated by the panel. Solution types used by the teachers and proposed by the inside panel were also classified into long term and short term

categories of management strategies identified through a review of the literature and of the incidents themselves. These categories were further refined into ten subcategories of management strategies. Comparisons were drawn between the types of strategies which the first-year teachers used and those recommended by experts in the field.

Findings

In order to achieve the purpose of this study, the following objectives, in question form, were answered and are cited as the framework for presenting the findings:

Objective one: What classroom discipline problems are frequently encountered and perceived as critical by first-year secondary vocational educators in the state of Florida?

Discipline problems were reported by the first-year teachers as being frequent in occurrence and critical in nature and can be categorized as follows:

1. Class assignment
2. Disruptive personal habits
3. Equipment safety
4. Interpersonal conflict
5. Mainstreaming of slow learners
6. Mischievous actions
7. Racial misunderstanding

Objective two: What types of methods were employed by the first-year secondary vocational educators in resolving the problems associated with the critical incidents selected for the study?

The following types of strategies were most frequently used by the first-year teachers in resolving classroom discipline problems:

1. External counseling
2. Direct approach
3. Corporal punishment
4. Academic approach

Objective three: According to the outside panel of experts, what types of solutions are most likely to be effective in resolving the selected critical incidents?

In recording the responses of the outside panel to the solutions provided by the teachers and the inside panel, the following types of solutions were chosen by the outside panel of experts as most likely to be effective in resolving the selected critical incidents:

1. Individual counseling
2. Group counseling
3. Behavioral
4. Removal approach
5. Direct approach

Objective four: Do the first-year secondary vocational teachers feel the need for additional training in handling discipline problems?

Over half of the sample illustrated their perceived need for additional training as evidenced by their comments. When asked to identify sources of assistance received in working with classroom discipline problems during their first year of teaching, over sixty percent of the respondents identified obtaining informal assistance from colleagues when confronted with a discipline problem and needing assistance. None specified in-service education as a source of assistance.

The need most emphasized in this study was "realistic" experiences/activities and/or training in classroom discipline prior to actual teaching on the job. In addition, the teachers cited needing more assistance in the following areas:

a. working with slow learners;

b. establishing and enforcing rules of conduct; and

c. maintaining classroom safety when working with laboratory equipment.

Objective five: What factors do first-year vocational teachers perceive as contributing to classroom discipline problems?

When asked which of eight items provided in the instrument contributed to classroom discipline problems at their schools, each of the following responses was recorded by ten percent or more of the sample:

1. Uneven and/or poorly defined disciplinary process (paperwork, line of authority, e.g.)
2. Insensitivity of staff or administration to cultural differences of students
3. Uneven administrative handling of disciplinary (severity of punishment) process by school officials
4. Curriculum not serving needs of students

Conclusions

The findings of the study seem to indicate the following:

1. There existed a discrepancy between what first-year vocational teachers did in resolving discipline problems and what experts felt "ought" to be done.
2. A broad range of disagreement existed between the two panels of experts in the identification of "effective" solutions for a given critical incident.
3. It was found that selecting a most likely to be effective solution was a very difficult process due to discipline being a complex multi-dimensional variable. Therefore, it was concluded that obtaining specific solutions to specific discipline problems appeared not to be feasible.
4. First-year vocational teachers have unmet needs in the area of classroom discipline which have not been met by existing pre-service or in-service programs;

they rely on colleagues and, to a lesser degree, on administrators for assistance.

5. Certain administrative practices, e.g. placement of students, were contributing factors in many discipline related incidents.
6. Disruptive personal habits were most frequently perceived as causes of critical discipline incidents by first-year vocational secondary teachers.
7. Secondary vocational teachers experienced special classroom management problems related to the laboratory setting and safety factors.
8. First-year secondary vocational teachers reacted to discipline crises by using solutions whose purpose was to produce immediate effects; little solution attention was given to consideration of long term effects which were advocated by experts in the field.

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